

Oh, I believe there are Angels Among Us,
Sent down to us from somewhere up above.
They come to you and me in our darkest hours
To show us how to live
To teach us how to give
To guide us with a light of love.

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Angels Among Us lyrics © Sony/ATV
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Have you ever faced a time when you were certain prayer was the only way you were going to make it through? (pause) When I was growing up my Dad would tell me to, "Pray as if whatever you need depended solely on God. Then work as if everything depended solely on me. God will meet you in the middle." That was the situation the church found itself in

during this passage. Herod has killed James the son of Zebedee by the sword. It pleased the Jewish leaders so much Herod captured Peter as well. The church was terrified about what might happen to their leader and friend, the apostle Peter. So they prayed earnestly for Peter's release (Acts 12:5).

My sisters and brothers, in our time of polarized opinions over just about everything; prayer is not excluded. People generally have two opinions about prayer. Either they believe prayer is a complete waste of time, or they recognize the power of prayer to connect us to God. So, why do we need to pray in the first place? If God is all knowing doesn't God already know what we need? (pause) If God is ever present doesn't God see when we are in trouble? (pause) If God is all powerful why doesn't God take the initiative to fix our problems without our having to be asked? (pause) The answer to all of these questions boils down to one word; righteousness.

Righteousness = right relationship with God and our neighbors.

All healthy relationships have give and take. God is not an enabler. God leads and equips us for ministry. God has given us all free will and the freedom to choose what we will do with our freedom. We have to do our part. You see Church, we have to want it. So the big question this morning is, what exactly do we really want? (pause)

If we want our country to stop being polarized. If we want the economy to be right and just. If we want to reach more people for Jesus Christ then what we have to want is to know God better. Church, do we really want to know God better? (pause) Do we want God to know us better? (pause) Isn't that the basis of a relationship? The better we know God the more we trust and believe what God tells us. Belief in God is the basis of righteousness. Abraham believed God and God accounted it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6).

My brothers and sisters, what do you believe? (pause) How does what you believe move you to action? (pause) Try thinking about it in these contexts. There is an ancient saying from the Middle East; "The most committed wins." (pause) Have you heard the phrase the most committed wins? (pause) Yeah? What about this? Have you heard this before?

"They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
yes they'll know we are Christians by our love."

My sisters and brothers what are we most committed to? What are we known for and what do people think we are committed to? (pause) As the Church we are the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in the world, in this community, among one another and in our homes. Shouldn't it be obvious who we are most committed to?

Church, I need an answer to this question. What is the church supposed to be most committed to? (pause) We are supposed to be committed to loving God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind and with all of our strength. (pause) We are supposed to be committed to loving our neighbor as ourselves. (pause) That is the Church. That is what we are supposed to be all about. Sharing our commitment with others – even those whom we don't like and especially with those outside of these walls. Our commitment to live out and share the Gospel is what we are supposed to be all about. The real question that needs to be answered this morning is how committed are we? (pause) How committed are we to God? (pause) How committed are we to loving our neighbors as ourselves? (pause) Are we committed enough to put our money where our mouth is? (pause) Are we committed enough to step out of our comfort zones to make a difference? (pause) Even when it is with people who are not like us? Even when we are commanded to share the Gospel with people who are not from Denton? Even when we are talking about the people who are outside of this room. How committed are we to share the Gospel outside of this room.

At the start of this message I asked you join me in singing the chorus to, "Angels Among Us," by Alabama. The reason I sang that song is because it is precisely those who make it a point to spend time with God in prayer who have a deep and abiding relationship with God. They are better able to hear God's words spoken into their heart. They are more open to God's grace as God shapes their lives. Those who are most committed to God's love spread the Gospel at all times. They share the good news of Jesus Christ through their actions; through their presence; through their gifts, and through their service to others. They see the opportunities and receive God's courage to share the Gospel through their words. Committed Christians pray for a deeper relationship with God so they might better understand God's will. They pray for God's guidance so they might have God's eyes to see the broken hearted. Committed Christians pray to be God's feet taking the good news of Jesus Christ out into the world. There are so many who have only heard lip service given to the Gospel and need to see God's people rushing out to share the good news of Jesus Christ. I was visiting with someone this past week who told me some of the very nicest people they have ever met are gay. And some of the meanest and nastiest people they have ever met are straight. I am sure if some of y'all think about it you can say the same thing about atheists and Christians. (pause) We can sure get downright nasty with one another. However, this is not the way of Jesus Christ. Committed Christians seek ways to be God's hands to clean the church, to help a neighbor, to assist a stranger. Prayer offers us a powerful relational connection to God and leads us to live like angels to those in the community who need to hear and see God is still at work today.

My sisters and brothers the Church is to be like a holy nation in the midst of an unholy world. We are to export the Gospel into the communities; the counties; and the countries in which we live. That does not mean we can be content to sit here in our beautiful church building and scream from the doors for people to come to us. We are called to carry the good news of Jesus Christ out into our community that we might be as angels among them. This church has a lot of programs and does a lot of things to help people. We send out a lot of money, and collect a lot of items to help the poor and the needy. And yes. Here's the push. Here's the toe stepping moment. God is calling us to do more. God is calling us to go out and to get to know people who are not like us. If everybody you know is a Christian and already has a church home then God calls us to go out and make some new friends. God is calling us to go out these doors to be like angels to those who do not know how good it is to be loved by God.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen